

Committee on Resources,

Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife & Oceans

[fisheries](#) - - Rep. Wayne Gilchrest, Chairman

U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C. 20515-6232 - - (202) 226-0200

Witness Statement

**STATEMENT OF
THE AMERICAN FARM BUREAU FEDERATION
TO THE
FISHERIES, CONSERVATION, WILDLIFE AND OCEANS SUBCOMMITTEE
OF THE
HOUSE RESOURCES COMMITTEE
REGARDING
THE COASTAL ZONE MANAGEMENT ACT
May 24, 2001**

The American Farm Bureau Federation represents more than five million member families in all 50 states and Puerto Rico. Farm Bureau is looking for, and will be supportive of, the right mix of public policy tools that will enable farmers and ranchers to improve net farm income, enhance their economic opportunity, preserve their property rights and enhance the nation's environment. The Coastal Zone Management Act needs to be supportive of agriculture's needs and goals for water quality protection.

America depends on a strong and sound agricultural policy. American agriculture provides food security for this nation and much of the rest of the world. We contribute to our national economic security by running a positive balance of trade and generating off-farm employment. We also contribute to the world's environmental security. In this specific area we can, with the proper incentives, do much more.

Increased regulatory costs on all levels - federal, state and local - are placing a heavy burden on individual farmers and ranchers as well as distorting the traditional structure of our industry. Farmers and ranchers understand the importance of protecting the environment. Their livelihood depends on it. However, the expenses that are incurred to meet compliance are taking a heavy toll on farm incomes and forcing farmers and ranchers to spread the cost of increased regulation over more units of production. The unintended consequence is the inability of small- and medium-sized family farms to compete in a highly charged regulatory environment.

Farm Bureau believes there is a need for a new environmental policy framework. We need to move beyond the current debate over whether the public has the right to mandate features and/or farming practices in the rural landscape. We are at that proverbial fork in the road and have concluded that mandates are not only counter-productive but more important, inefficient. Our members understand that there is need for a different set of tools and farm policy options. We believe market forces and government programs can work together to enhance the nation's productivity and environmental objectives.

The existing environmental policy framework is not equipped to function in a way that is most efficient in achieving the policy objectives we are faced with in the future. Command and control mechanisms do not provide an attractive incentive for farmers and ranchers to produce the things that the public wants. A new,

more efficient and effective approach should be developed to assist farmers and ranchers in providing the public with what it wants. It should be voluntary, provide sufficient economic incentives and clearly define the benefits that society at large derives from agriculture.

We believe that the reauthorization of the CZMA should affirmatively support a preference for voluntary, incentive-based programs for water quality protection for agriculture. The costs of planning and regulatory water quality actions for nonpoint sources will impact agriculture in the coastal zone. The costs of permits, plans and potential production restrictions will be a burden that will put the affected farmers at a competitive disadvantage within their industry. The coastal zone program should be looking to enhance and support agriculture for its contributions to open space, wildlife habitat, and the local economy. Ultimately, increased resources must be made available to landowners if we are to make continued progress in improving water quality.

Existing programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) of USDA and the Section 319 nonpoint grants program of EPA provide resources for landowners to improve water quality. In the next farm bill we support efforts to continue and expand the opportunities for farmers to increase their environmental protection with cost and technical assistance through voluntary, incentive-based approaches.

Farm Bureau policy states that the next farm bill should:

- Continue to improve the environment through expanded incentives to encourage voluntary soil conservation, water and air quality programs, and advance technological and biotechnological procedures that are based on sound science and are economically feasible;
- Improve the quality of rural life and increase rural economic development;
- Provide willing producers with additional voluntary incentives for adopting and continuing conservation practices to address air and water quality, soil erosion and wildlife habitat.

Bridging the gap between where we are now and where we want to be in the future requires an expanded public investment in agriculture. Increases in conservation incentives are needed to lay the base today for responsible growth in our industry.

Our vision is to capture the opportunity and efficiencies of providing producers with additional conservation incentives for adopting and continuing conservation practices to address air and water quality, soil erosion and wildlife habitat. The Coastal Zone Management Act should support this approach for agriculture.

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